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By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

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Cantantes licet uſque (minus via lædet) eamus.

VIRGIL.

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

SIR,

I DO not know that you, or any of your predeceſſors, have ever paid your compliments to a moſt uſeful branch of this community; I mean the ancient and reputable ſociety of BALLAD-SINGERS. Theſe harmonious itinerants do not cheat the country people with idle tales of being taken priſoners by the Turks, or maimed by the Algerines, but earn an honeſt livelihood, by

by a proper exertion of thoſe talents, with which nature has endowed them. For if a brawny-ſhouldered porter may live by turning prize-fighter, or a gentleman of the ſame make, by turning petticoat-penſioner, I do not ſee why a perſon endued with the gift of a melodious voice, is not equally entitled to all the advantages which can poſſibly ariſe from it.

WITH regard to the antiquity of this profeſſion, in all probability, we owe the invention of it to old Homer himſelf, who hawked his Iliad about the ſtreets for an obolus a book. But as the trade was not then brought into any repute, and as his poetry wanted the refinement of modern times, he could ſcarce earn bread for himſelf and his family. Theſpis, the Athenian, made a great improvement in the art; he harneſſed Pegaſus to a cart, from which he diſperſed his ballads; and by keeping all the public fairs, made ſhift to pick up a tolerable maintenance. This improvement our Engliſh ballad-ſingers have neglected: whether they think there is any thing really ominous in mounting a cart, or whether the ſneers of the populace, who are always throwing out their inſolent jeſts on their ſuperiors, have prevented them from making uſe of that vehicle, I will not pretend to determine.

AMONG the Romans too this practiſe was preſerved. Virgil makes one of his ſhepherd's ſay to another, by way of reproach,

Non tu in triviis, indocte, ſolebas
Stridenti miſerum ſtipulâ diſperdere carmen?

But

But this was becauſe, as Milton tranſlates it, " his " lean and flaſhy ſongs grated on his ſcrannel pipe " of wretched ſtraw." But this never can be objected to my fair country-women, whoſe melodious voices give every ſyllable (not of a lean and flaſhy, but of a fat and plump ſong) it's juſt emphaſis, to the delight, and inſtruction of the attentive audience. By the way, I ſuſpect that Virgil was a hawker himſelf; for he ſays,

Aſcræumque cano Romana per oppida carmen,

which in plain Engliſh is no more than this,

I ſing my ballads through the ſtreets of Rome.

WERE it not for this muſical ſociety, the country people would never know how the world of letters goes on. Party ſongs might come out, and the parſon never ſee them; jovial ſongs, and the ſquire never hear them; or love ſongs, and his daughter never ſigh over them. I would have a ballad-ſinger well furniſhed with all theſe, before ſhe ſets out on her travels: then bloody murthers for ſchool-boys and apprentices, conundrums and conjuring books for footmen and maid-ſervants, hiſtories and ſtory-books for young maſters and miſſes, will turn to an excellent account. And as the trades of ballad-ſinging and fortune-telling generally go together in the country, like ſurgeon and apothecary, I think it would not be amiſs, if their friends the poets would furniſh them with rhimes ſuited to the occaſion, that their predictions may wear the true maſk of oracles, and like thoſe of the ſibyl, be given out in metre. And to come ſtill nearer to the original, a joint-ſtool would make an excellent tripod.

USELESS

USELESS as this profeſſion may ſeem, it ſerves to ſupport two others; I mean the worſhipful and numerous companies of printers who have no buſineſs, and poets who have no genius. A good ſong, that is a very good ſong, *I love Sue*, for inſtance, or *Collin and Phœbe*, will run you through fifty editions: but let it be never ſo good, it will always give way to a newer; ſo that the printer has by this means conſtant employment for his preſs, which would otherwiſe be idle, and the poet a conſtant market for his wit, which would otherwiſe live and die with it's author in obſcurity.

As I have a great regard for theſe itinerant ſyrens, not ariſing from any perſonal favours that I have received from them, nor founded on whim and fancy, but from a well-weighed conſideration of their ſervice to the public, I have thought of a ſcheme, which will at once both ennoble their profeſſion, and render their lives infinitely more comfortable. It is this. Many profeſſors of muſic, whoſe talents have been ſhamefully neglected in town (for in theſe degenerate days, men of merit are but little regarded) condeſcend for the amuſement of the country people, to enliven the humours of the wake with violins, dulcimores, harpinets, &c. With theſe ingenious gentlemen I would perſuade our fair ballad-ſingers to incorporate. Some few misfortunes they have indeed met with, which I think myſelf obliged in honour to reveal; and thoſe are, the loſs of eyes, legs, and other trifles, which a prudent, thinking woman would diſregard, when over-balanced by ſuch excellent qualifications. The expence of children may poſſibly be urged, as an objection

jection to this ſcheme; but I anſwer, that children will of neceſſity come, whether our ballad-ſinging ladies are married or not: and while the parents are mutually travelling with the younger at their backs, the elder will, in all probability, be able to walk; ſo that they may get a reputable livelihood, by the lawful profeſſion of begging, till ſuch time as they are of a proper age to learn the rudiments of muſic under the tuition of their father. But pilfering I would by all means have them avoid; it hurts the credit of the profeſſion.

Now what a comfortable life muſt this be! A perpetual concert of vocal and inſtrumental muſic! And if Orpheus, with only his lyre, drew after him beaſts and trees (by which people are apt to imagine that nothing more is meant than the country-bumkins) what will not the melodious fiddle of one of theſe profeſſors do, when in uniſon with the voice of his beautiful helpmate?

As for the marriage act, and guardians conſent, and ſuch new-fangled ſtuff, I would by no means have them pay any regard to it. For as the ladies, when in town for the winter ſeaſon, are generally reſident about Fleet-Ditch, a certain public-ſpirited clergyman, who lodges in that neighbourhood, and whom I would by all means recommend, will tack together half a dozen couple at a minute's warning, and the parliament be never the wiſer.

I am,

SIR,

Your moſt humble ſervant,

T. D.

Whereas